Today is August 20, 2008, and welcome to the HR Weekly Podcast from the State Office of Human Resources.  This week's topic concerns using social network services for recruiting and selecting employees.

According to Wikipedia, "[a] **social network service** focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.  Most social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services."

Social network services, such as Linked In, My Space, and Facebook, are also full of potential job candidates.  Using these social network services allows access to candidate-supplied information, such as with whom the potential candidate associates and what outside interests the candidate has.

In a recent article found at www.managementresources.com , Jerry Thurber, president of a California-based company that assists businesses in using the web to recruit job candidates, says there are three ways of looking at the data gathered from social network services.  First, analyze the basic data alone.  Look at the candidate's previous employment, education, and residence.  Second, consider the data in its proper context.  For example, Thurber says that his own information on a social network service will show that he runs in races. This information may seem irrelevant to a basic job search; however, information about the races he runs could reveal the different places he has lived, the involvement within his community, and his outside of work interests. Third, pay attention to who else is in the person's social network service. These other people could serve as other references that are absent from the candidate's resume.

There is also the issue of whether or not using social network services as a recruitment tool is an invasion of privacy. Thurber responds to this issue by stating: "Once someone posts it on the Internet I view that as public information." He believes that an employer must first decide what online information is relevant to the hiring process. Other issues regarding social network services include: lack of procedures on how to handle information from the internet and also potential use of information that would be prohibited under traditional methods, such as race, lawful activities, and disabilities. Thurber encourages employers to take initiative and devise their own guidelines for using technology such as social network services because employers can browse through the networking sites or post jobs on these sites.

It is important to discuss any issues online that raise a red flag with the potential candidate before jumping to conclusions. After establishing that the retrieved data is relevant, then make sure it is in fact true.

Using technology as a recruitment tool is inevitable.  Potential employers and employees need to make an effort to understand that this resource is becoming more and more available and that there are smart ways to use it.

If you have questions about this issue, please contact your HR consultant at 803-737-0900.

Thank you.